

PERVASIVE, INTERNALISED VIOLENCE IN SOUTH AFRICA: Reflections on Causation and Future Trajectory

Background

1. In South Africa the 1993 level of murders exceeds 20,000 - when complete - probably 22,500. Given a fairly high level of non-reporting this suggests a total of 27,500. For comparison the USA total (a relatively violent society with fuller reporting and seven times the population) is about 50,000.

There is no reason to suppose that levels of non-life destroying violence are less unusually high. Anecdotal evidence suggests they are.

2. The standard assumption is that a high percent of the deaths are directly related to political violence and therefore to the apartheid system. The implication of this empirico/causal explanation is that the ending of apartheid/installation of legitimate government could/logically should lead to a rapid fall in murder/violence rates.
3. Unfortunately, the estimates of 1993 directly political violence related deaths range between 3,000 and 4,000. The balance of 'non-political' murders of 23,500 to 24,500 remains extremely high for a population of 40 million odd.
4. The non (non-directly) political deaths are apparently not unusual in distribution: domestic violence, fighting while inebriated and killing in the course of robbery and during or after rape. The same seem to hold for non-lethal violence. The distinguishing characteristic is the numbers. Those suggest that violence is a first resort and lethal violence is widely perceived, if not precisely as acceptable, as a matter of fact, normal action by an unusually high proportion of the population (even if unusually high may be as low as 5% to 10% of adults).

Causal Contributions

5. To give apartheid as a one word answer to "Why?" is inadequate (especially if "Why?" is to be followed by "What is to be done?") and also inaccurate.
6. Political murders are caused primarily by apartheid. The context of oppression, degradation, lack of elections and attempts to insulate areas from state forces and their (real or supposed) servants and informers is one leading directly to mayhem.
7. However, while apartheid may be the cause of political murders in Natal there are deeper historic roots for what might be termed "Zulu against Zulu" violence; roots which go back to Kings Cetshwayo and Shaka. The majority of Zulu speaking people south of the Buffalo River are the descendants of refugees from the rise of Shaka's kingdom and, to a lesser extent, from losing factions within the kingdom. They are linguistically and culturally Zulu but not naturally supporters of a movement using the symbols of the Zulu kingdom and led by a descendant of Cetshwayo's prime minister. North of the Buffalo the patterns of conflict echo the cleavages that arose out of Garnet Wolseley's attempt to create a series of statelets in Zululand with primarily anti-Cetshwayo heads; the breakdown of that system; the abortive second coming of Cetshwayo and the wars leading to the final conquest. Where an anti-Cetshwayo statelets' kinglet built up a base and resisted the restoration of Cetshwayo, there today tends to be violent resistance to the imposition of an Inkatha monopoly of power (e.g. Eshowe - the old fief of 'Paramount Chief' John Dunne).
8. The non-political murders do, in a sense, flow from apartheid but in a different and more complex way:
 - a. Extreme poverty often breeds crime and extreme poverty combined with extreme inequality almost always does;
 - b. extreme degradation often is reacted against, with violence;
 - c. perceived illegitimacy of state, many laws, the legal system forecloses respect for law and order even in respect to areas outside apartheid; and

- d. also forecloses normal remedies for discontents, forcing the aggrieved to fall back on "self help" measures which are likely to involve violence;
- e. the foregoing create an atmosphere in which some forms of violence (including lethal violence) come to be tolerated or even approved and
- f. all of the foregoing create a sea of violence in which perfectly 'normal', apolitical criminals can swim relatively unseen.

- 9. It is relevant to note that Brazil - in a number of respects the country most parallel to South African in both economic structures/policy and in the pervasiveness of entrenched (albeit not statutory) racism - also has one of the world's highest murder rates.
- 10. The combination of factors is important. Extreme poverty alone does not lead to high murder rates vide Maputo and Dar es Salaam. Nor do high levels of robbery (which characterise Dar es Salaam albeit not Maputo) necessarily lead to high levels of robbery associated violence, let alone lethal violence. The outcomes, in fact vary widely among Dar es Salaam, Accra, Lusaka, Nairobi and Lagos (low to very high) for reasons which appear to relate to specific interactions within urban micro cultures. The presence of a substantial European ancestry minority does not have a uniform influence: neither Maputo, Windhoek nor Gaborone are violent in comparative terms whereas Lagos and (even before the 1965- ????) political violence sequence) Kampala/Mengo are.
- 11. None of this denies the causal role of apartheid in creating the factors leading to the present climate of violence. It may however, raise doubts as to how far and how fast the introduction of a legitimate constitutional order/government will erode it.

After Legitimate Government?

- 12. "After apartheid" is not a relevant term in that the socio-political and political-economic consequences of apartheid will remain plainly visible for decades. After the achievement of legitimate government is a more relevant short term (assuming 1994 constitutional settlement/elections) one.

13. What then:

- a. the government will be legitimate as overtly perceived (but perhaps with that view incompletely internalised);
- b. the same may be true of the judicial system and of laws;
- c. but it is very uncertain whether the police will be perceived as legitimate unless there are massive changes in attitudes, priorities and personnel (in which context it is not entirely whimsical to suggest that the ANC's military wing might better be integrated into the police than into the army. It is the police who need to relate to black people on a basis of trust day by day);
- d. a factor enhanced by the probability (judging from Zimbabwean and Namibian experience) many white officers will 'keep their heads down' and do next to nothing. That may avoid provoking riots but is hardly functional to reducing background levels of violence;
- e. there will be a substantial body of township "comrades" who perceive themselves as having been in the vanguard of the 1980s/90s struggle but have little education, no work experience, no real integration into any political grouping, are virtually unemployable and therefore are exceedingly bitter because to them the new order seems a betrayal and a continuation of their exclusion;
- f. the first electoral exercise will have been marked by violence (especially in Natal and townships) so that no clean break between violent and electoral struggle phases is (or could be) perceived.

14. That is not a background that can lead to great optimism as to easy reduction of violence levels even in respect to political violence proper. It is relevant to note that in a context of poverty and deprivation contrasting with nearby affluence even in systems with a record of competitive, multi party election political violence can become entrenched and very difficult to reduce (vide Jamaica).

15. The elements cited in Par 13 also suggest that quasi political violence - against public service workers and facilities (not limited to police) employees as symbols of rejected authority - is likely to remain high. Because there is by now no tradition of expecting to receive services and to pay rates and charges the new, legitimate local governmental bodies' staff (especially but not only collectors and disconnectors) will be at risk even if Civics launch a massive education campaign on their behalf and service providers are imaginative in trying to relate to clients (as Escom on occasion has become).
16. In respect to generalised violence several factors will pertain:
 - a. many people will remain poor;
 - b. the fragmented, frequently combatative and often far from inclusive nature of community self-organisation will remain at least in part;
 - c. the habit of bowing to coercion and - especially - not going to the police for protection or redress will not easily be reversed;
 - d. there will be large numbers of illicit, cheap firearms;
 - e. economic group battles (e.g. taxi wars) are likely to prove very difficult to contain and to channel into mediation processes;
 - f. the habit (weltanschauung? One hesitates to say culture) of speedy resort to violence economically, domestically, in inter personal relations now that it appears to be deeply internalised by many persons will not fade away as legitimate governmental structures appear;
 - g. hope for a better life and of an end to marginalisation socially and economically will be in short supply - possibly even more so than today once the limits of possible speedy change become evident, in some cases brutally contradicting unattainable expectations of what "Amandla" can mean for day to day or year to year life.

17. That suggests that there is little reason to expect a rapid decrease (or perhaps any decrease at all?) in levels of non-political (indirectly political) violence. That is likely to be especially true if the police remain distrusted, inadequately trained for new roles and with many holdover force members (especially, but not only, white ones) keeping their heads well down.

What Might Be Done?


18. The preceding vista is not a pretty one - rather it is an appalling one. To say it is dominantly the heritage of apartheid is valid but operationally less than helpful.
19. The costs of inaction or unsuccessful action will be high. That is above all a moral and a human consideration. But it is also a matter of effective governance and provision of services, of morale to work hard (another victim of apartheid), of budgetary constraint (high levels of violence do require high police-court-prison expenditure) and of general economic cost raising/animal spirits lowering/investor and customer discouraging (the extreme case being tourism).
20. A number of steps might help:
- a. a general macro economic strategy making poverty reduction and livelihood expansion central;
 - b. a land and rural reform strategy making acceptable rural household livelihoods available to a high proportion of present rural residents to avert waves of refugees from rural into urban deprivation;
 - c. high priority to occupationally oriented adult education specifically designed for 16 to 30 year old township/settlement residents who are now virtually uneducated and unemployable which is directly related to the livelihood expansion strategy to ensure that it is not education for continued unemployment;
 - d. urban labour intensive public works, maintenance, construction foci (on projects which need to be done anyhow - the point is reallocation from capital to labour intensive approaches not devising "backyard pagoda" schemes, e.g. basic drainage and

sidewalks in township and 'squatter' resettlement areas not 'flowerbeds everywhere') to reduce the structural labour force entrants/expansion of livelihoods imbalance;

- e. concentration on incorporating US (ANC army) cadres primarily into the police rather than the army because it is the former who must have good day to day, face to face relations with poor black South Africans based on mutual trust and perceived legitimacy. (The primary victims of violence - and potentially the force which can contain and reduce it most and most rapidly - are non-violent, poor, township and squatter area dwellers);
 - f. building up broadly based, multiple community structures which do mediate to provide alternatives to violence for dispute resolution backed by official structures analogous to the Peace Commissions/Goldstone Commission;
 - g. providing effective protection for citizens who report violence to, bear witness in court cases involving violence so that fear of personal consequences will not be/become as effective a barrier to cooperation with police/courts in the future as their perceived illegitimacy is now;
 - h. broadening the access to official safety nets (including but not limited to, strengthening the old age and disability pension structures) and facilitating (including by grants) civil society ones by community based bodies (including religious congregations, trade union branches, local women's organisations) to reduce destitution. Even if elimination of severe poverty by this route is not possible until both livelihoods expansion (reducing demand) and fiscal as well as production growth (increasing allocable resource) have 'taken off' very substantial reduction of destitution and hopeless misery could be achieved.
21. Most of these items are on the policy exploration agenda now for reasons other than violence reduction. What may not be being done is to consider their potential for violence reduction and their possible re-articulation (not necessarily requiring more scarce resources) jointly and in the context of a specific strategic focus on violence

reduction. However, c-e-f-g do not appear to have attracted substantial attention.

22. The additional cost of action on the foregoing fronts could be quite low. The expenditures on a-b-d-h (which would dominate total costs) are desired/prioritised for other reasons - the issue is one of re-allocating in detailed articulation rather than of spending more money. Of the other measures only c (targeted adult education) would have a high price tag (incorporating ANC military cadres into the police rather than the army would not raise total military/police costs). The costs of inaction could be very substantially higher.



RHG
Falmer
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